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ABSTRACT

This document defines curriculum reform in Romania as the elaboration and progressive setting up of a new educational paradigm unaltered by the outlooks and consequences of the Communist era. Although the strategic and technical aspects of implementing the new reality are still at the stage of advanced working hypotheses, the essential objective and long-term target of the reform is giving up the centralist-demagogic model of education, and the gradual passing to an essentially realistic and dynamic model, flexible and fully adapted to present and future changes of the society. Viewing educational reform as primarily curricular reform, the document is organized in 2 sections. The first section offers a brief but comprehensive image of present and future problems Romania is facing in the field of curriculum development during the transition period. This section discusses the school system; teacher education; and documents, institutions, and decision making in curriculum development. The second section has a more theoretical background and provides elements concerning conceptual tendencies and the priorities for a future strategy of curriculum development as part of the larger pedagogical reform. This section deals with aspects of the relationship between present and future research and curriculum development, focusing on 3 types of problems: (1) research as a source in elaborating the concept of curriculum reform; (2) defining a new strategical model; and (3) priorities for the future. Contains 12 references. (DK)

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# Curriculum Reform in Romania

SO 023 185

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# CURRICULUM REFORM IN ROMANIA

## 0. INTRODUCTION

### 0.1. Preliminary Considerations

The idea of a deep-going reform of the Romanian educational system represents a great concern for all those involved in this field, either working in various decision-making institutions, or being researchers, teachers or persons belonging to other professional and social categories. And if we use the term reform in its strictly etymological meaning, it is obvious that we do not mean the superficial "cosmetic" changes, underlying in fact any transition period, but lacking reliability in a long-term perspective; on the contrary, we refer to the elaboration and progressive setting up of a new educational paradigm unaltered by the outlooks and consequences of an epoch, which we hope to be ended up.

Nevertheless we must also admit a fact: although a possible conceptual component of the new paradigm has already been outlined on the whole[1], the strategic and tactical aspects of implementing this reality are still at the stage of more or less advanced working hypotheses (Cristea, 1991b).

But there is one aspect, clear to us even for the time being. The essential objective and at the same time the long-term target of

the reform under discussion is giving up the centralist - demagogic model of education - artificial, rigid and impermeable, structured in the anachronistic terms of an industrial society; and the passing, gradually, to an essentially realistic and dynamic model, flexible and fully adapted to present-day and future changes of the society.

0.2. The Object of Study

Among specialists, it seems to exist now a consensus of opinions on the idea that any education reform is - if not exclusively, at least mainly - a curriculum reform.

Starting from the assertions already made here, my paper is organized in two sections:

(I) In the first one, I will try to offer, in a short and sketchy manner, a comprehensive image of present-day and future problems Romania is facing in the field of curriculum development during the so-called "transition period".

(II) The second section - with a more theoretical background - will provide a number of elements concerning conceptual tendencies and the priorities for a future strategy of curriculum development - as part of the larger pedagogical reform.

Finally, I mention the fact, that possible "deviations" from the aims in view are exclusively due to the complexity of a situation hard to outline in a pre-established set-up.

# 1. CURRENT TRENDS

Until the proper reform, the Romanian Educational System (RES) is going through a "transition period". Such a period implies a

series of progressive changes meant to bring corrections to the former contents and to adapt the existing stuctures to the new objectives of education. For the time being this aim is achieved by governmental decisions published prior to the beginning of each school year.

In order to discuss the central focus of this case study it is necessary at first to describe shortly some context factors; they provide in fact the basis for any type of products and decisions concerning curriculum development.

## 1.1. The School System

In the transition period the structure of the RES (see Appendix IV) presents some changes in comparison with de situation before 1989. The most important of them are: (a) the establishing of the compulsory education of 8 years (having the tendency to extend education age up to at least 16 years); (b) an obvious reduction of the number of "vocational upper secondary schools/lyceums" (USSc) and - consequently -the reestablishing of the so-called "theoretical (general) lyceum" with both "Sciences" and "Humanities" profiles; (c) considerable multiplication of the "channels" for pupils to follow in the USSc; (d) the creation of an extended number of "vocational schools" and "complementary/apprenticeship schools" (could be attended after graduating from compulsory education); (e) the assuring of a great variety of "foot-bridges" between profiles and types of the USSc.

## 1.2. Teachers

As to the pre-service training, the teachers of the secondary schools are trained within 4/5 years at the University, in various subjects; teachers for the primary education are graduates from special pedagogical high-schools/lyceums (after five years of study).

I have to mention the fact, that - as to universities - special decisions have been made in the last two years, concerning the extension of curricula for educational sciences, psycho-pedagogy, and "didactics of various subject matters", considered to be very scarce up to now. A greater stress is placed on enhancing the contacts between future teachers and pupils, that is the concrete work in class and the school curriculum.

The definite appointment of the teachers in the RES occurs through an examination (theoretical and practical) organized three years from graduation. After this, the in-service training is ensured in two ways: (a) the first one, compulsory, through "refreshing" courses (fr. "recyclage") organized from 5 to 5 years; and (b) the second, optional, by obtaining "didactic degrees" (I and II), with relative important implications on the salary. As a rule, during the in-service training, teachers follow two modules: one, in the specific subject (as a science) and the second in the methodology of teaching. Although the psycho-pedagogic and didactic interface of these types of training is more obvious, the Ministry of Education has taken measures of revising the curricula. It is in fact a more serious approach of the components directly involved in the teaching practice as well as new possibilities offered to the teachers to participate in the development of curriculum by discussions, reports of their research and experiments in the classroom.

1.3. Curriculum Development: Documents, Institutions and Decision Making

In Romania two curricular documents are used. The first one - the National Teaching Plan - consists of a list of subjects for each type of school and the number of hours for every subject and every grade. The second one - the Programme of the Study Content (one programme for every subject) - is made up of a list of attainment targets for every type of school and every grade. Moreover, there is also a list of the topics in the respective subject.

Because there is no specialized agency for this operation yet, the elaboration of the two documents is coordinated by a special organism of the Ministry of Education - the Department of Curriculum and Evaluation - in cooperation with the Institute for Educational Sciences. The central organisms of elaboration are the so-called National Committees (NCs). Thus, there are NCs for each subject taught in the RES as well as - separately - for the pre-school and primary education. The NCs are made up - generally - of University professors (1/3 of the members), researchers in education, inspectors and teachers with very good results. In essence, the NCs establish and revise periodically - in the sense of their improvement - the objectives and the contents, often comparing them with those of other countries; at the same time, they recommend methods and equipment, approve teaching aids and textbooks. The latter ones are, for the time being, unique; in other words, in Romania, all the pupils use at the same form and subject, the same textbook.

The decisions of the NCs for each subject matter are ammended - often without substantial changes - by the Ministry. After this, their implementation becomes compulsory for the schools and for the teachers.

A few explanations are necessary here. Although relatively centralized for the time being, the present system moves rapidly towards a positive evolution. Thus, as we have noticed, the teachers have few opportunities to participate directly in elaborating the documents we have mentioned; but they can do it indirectly, either through their representatives in the central committees, or through articles published in the press, discussions or debates organized at differend levels. However, the Ministry and the NCs - subordinate to the Ministry, for the time being - are more open than before 1989 to the suggestions coming from the teachers.

Additionally, these have now the possibility to adapt locally the Programme of the Study Content to the level and the means of the

pupils. This possibility is now accepted being one of the new trends of the RES. More generally speaking, in the "transition period", central authority is going to increase the flexibility of understanding of the "compulsory" character of the Programme.

A very important problem the Ministry is concerned with lately is the descentralization of the process of curriculum development. As an example, for the beginning, it started with a new subject - "Technological education". A general framework for attainment targets was published and NC let each school to determine the most suitable and desirable concrete modalities to develop teaching.

In conclusion, one can say that the whole area of curriculum development in the period of transition is to guide the transformations in order to make step by step small changes towards the general objectives of the new reform.

## 2. THE FUTURE - THE TIME OF REFORM

As we have already pointed out at the beginning, the second section
will deal with several aspects regarding the relationship between present-day and future research and curriculum development (see J.van Bruggen, 1992,9). This part will mainly focus on three types of problems:(a) the research - as a source, alongside with others, in elaborating the general concept of curriculum reform; (b) defining a new strategical model of curriculum development, which I shall give as a working hypothesis; (c) priorities for the future.
The present contribution will deal rather with theoretical problems, directly linked to the mechanism specific to curriculum development, I consider to be at least as important now as the concrete aspects concerning, for instance, "reform" within the fields of certain school subjects analyzed separately.

## 2.1. Some Possible Alternatives and Concrete Solutions

Various initiatives concerning education reform and firstly, curriculum reform have come up during the last two years, either on the personal level or the institutional one, from the following sources: (1) The Department of Preuniversity Education in the Ministry of Education and Science; (2) The Institute for Educational Sciences; (3) The World Bank (during several missions, when some significant reports were written up[2]); (4) Researchers from other institutions, teaching staff from university and preuniversity education; (5) The teachers' Trade Unions and/or professional organizations etc.

The scientific research - together with the other fields interested in this problem - has focused on several aspects[3] looked upon as premises for designing a pedagogical reform in the particular situation of our country (cf. Cristea, 1991 a;1992). These aspects have been the following: (a) critical evaluation of the Romanian school-system experience - the curricular one included, during the last two decades; (b) comparison with the evolution tendencies existing in this field in other countries; (c) pointing out the relations between the social reform and the educational one[4].

Without giving here more details (see note 3, for further information on this aspect), I consider that, in time, there has developed that set of common ideas which seem to be now a first result, a first bridge launched to the future.

The ideas I referred to were mainly grouped around three of the basic components (C) - not the single ones, in fact - of a curriculum reform: (1) the conceptual component; (2) the strategical - tactical component and finally; (3) the institutional and managerial component, each of them having a number of (sub)components (SC).

Without providing other details (for further data see Appendix

I) I shall point out only the most important aspects:

(1) A whole range of problems have been cleared up on the conceptual level:

a) Theoretically, an option has been made for the educational model (the curricular one included) of the post-industrialized (computerized) society. It is a transdisciplinary model supposing multiple adaptability, general and specific creativity; hence, the need to put a special stress in the future curriculum, not on information, but (if we can call it so) on "teaching directly mental and practical skills/capacities", or "general disponibilities".

b) The educational ideal, as an adjusting element of the new curriculum, is no longer the anachronic "formation of the working force"; this time it aims at "developing human individuality freely, entirely and harmoniously, building an autonomous and creative personality" (The Bill of Education Law).

Alongside with the new educational ideal, the principles which will directly adjust the curriculum development process in the future are the following: ♣ equalizing the chances of entering and attending schools; ♣ ensuring the open character of the system (vertically and horizontally), as well as smooth passings from one school stage to another; ♣ improving the relationships between the so-called "general culture" (represented by a "core curriculum") and the specialized one; ♣ pupils' progressive orientation; ♣ option for a humanistic democratic pedagogy (in management and interpersonal relations), with an alternative/pluralistic character.

c) As a project for future transposition of these elements on curriculum level, new "National Teaching Plans" have been proposed for debates (Cristea, 1991 b). The lack of space prevents us from commenting upon them now.

(2) On the strategic level[5], the next stage would be "filling" these "Plans" with a new curriculum "content". During a reform period the most difficult question is: How can this

thing be achieved? And it is the scientifical research that should express its viewpoint in this respect. I think this is in fact the top priority for the next 5 years.

(3) Concerning the organisational and institutional structures, as a first step, the National Council for Curricula and Textbooks Reform, as well as the National Council for Evaluation have been set up at the beginning of this year. Their target is the management of the whole process for curriculum reform. Working groups on Mathematics and Sciences, Arts and Humanities and Vocational Education are being organized now, after the World Bank recommendations. Participating institutions, tasks and the functioning regulations of these bodies are to be established as soon as possible.

## 2.2. A Hypothesis for Curriculum Development Strategy

From the possible strategies which could be used for the concrete development of a new curricula, I shall broadly present here the hypothesis advanced by the Department of Curriculum Development at the Institute for Educational Sciences. This strategy was published in December 1991 (Crişan, Mindruţ, Singer, 1991). Afterwards, in an official document called "Report on the Reform's Stage"(cf. Cristea, 1992) - the former chief of Preuniversitary Education Department suggested the need to adapt this proposal to a series of priorities occurring meanwhile. This fact implicitly means its recognition as one of the possible bases for the future solutions. In the meantime, this strategy has been improved several times by: (a) collective debates within groups of researchers and teachers; (b) contacts with the World Bank experts.

In this report I could also use the ideas and model drafts recently presented in the Ministry of Education by Mr. Robert van Oosten and Mr. S. Hoek[6] from the National Institute for Curriculum Development in The Netherlands. They came to Romania as members of a World Bank mission.

## 2.2.1. Strategy's Premises

The strategical hypothesis I put forward starts from the following premises:

(1) Curriculum reform should deal from the very beginning with several significant changes in the teaching staff's training and outlook. This fact can be achieved by at least four possibilities: (a) introducing progressively in schools, new teaching learning and teacher's support materials (not necessarily "textbooks", but "booklets" or "little books" with experimental and innovating character; (b) reforming the pre-service and in-service training system in the next 2-3 years; (c) developing a didactical - methodological advice system, fundamentally new as compared to the existing one; (d) working out a new really democratic model for the teaching staff's participation in the elaboration and decision processes concerning curriculum development.

I think these aspects bring about several methodological consequences: (a) it is preferable the curriculum reform should be not a top-down reform, but a bottom-up one (because the teachers will be active participants to the extent in which they will become aware of this need for change); (b) it is absolutely necessary this reform should advance simultaneously from both "poles" of the educational system: from the interior of "the preuniversitary education system", as well as from the pre-service and in-service training system; (c) it is advisable the curriculum reform should take over and mainly use those teachers involved in what I would call hidden or discreet reform (namely, the teachers, who not waiting for the top-down ideas and "indications",have been practicing a "curriculum reform" for a long time individually).

(2) Curriculum reform is better "to simultaneously contaminate" and propagate itself into concentric circles over all the "curricular components" (assessment and examination; educational technology, teaching/learning and support materials, textbooks, methods etc.).

(3) Gradually, the curriculum development process should descentralize substantially. Central bodies (preferably those made up of experts and not the administrative ones) would have to assure only the general curricular framework (general goals and aims; attainment targets, criterial advice concerning the selection and the organization of subject matters/"contents" etc.); thus, the concrete choice of the materials used for reaching attainment targets (textbooks, auxiliary materials etc.), as well as the implementation strategies themselves will exclusively be the school/teaching staff's rights. As far exams are concerned, the National Council of Evaluation would establish syllabi for different subjects announced in due time.

(4) Curriculum reform will be successful to the extent in which it will assure the involvement, joint interest and commitment of other parts of society (professional and employers' organizations, reprezentatives of industry and trade unions, radio and TV corporations, press etc.).

2.2.2. Strategy Design

Speaking about strategy design, we should take into account the interpenetration of three entity categories (see Appendix II): (1) its components; (2) the implementation schedule; (3) the organizational framework and the involed institutions, functioning mechanisms including. I shall try to deal now with the dynamics of these aspects.

2.2.2.1 This strategy refers to 8 basic components: (1) general finalities (aims) of the educational system; (2) general objectives of the subjects (or "interdisciplinary fields"); (3) attainment targets; (4) "curriculum" (in its restricted meaning, i.e. syllabi/fr. "programme"); (5) various types of materials (experimental teaching - learning; support and educational etc.); (6) examination/assessment; (7) pre-service training; (8) in-service training.

Each of them has a number of subcomponents. I shall refer only to the most important ones, taking their functional

interdependence as discussion premise.

2.2.2.2. As regards the schedule itself, it includes: (A) a (preliminary) experimental stage; (B) an operational stage and (C) a generalization one (see Appendix III).

A. During the first stage, the attention will be focussed on the elaboration, experimentation and progressive sedimentation of a new curriculum (the teaching staff will be involved from the first moments of this approach).
Roughly speaking, this stage will include the following moments:

- redefining - in a first provisional working draft - the general finalities of primary and secondary education, according to the new conception governing the reform on the whole;
- redefining in the same manner the general objectives of certain subject matters, "interdisciplinary matters", groups of subject matters etc.;
- elaborating an outline based on the previous stage (a "discussion basis") regarding the new attainment targets;
- elaborating a first guiding "syllabus" draft (not under the form of certain topics, titles etc., as before, but as some criteria for contents selection/organization or possible recommendations/exemples for setting up certain topics, titles, modules etc., given as illustrations);
- using the above-mentioned components as bases in making experimental teaching/learning materials worked out under the form of modules/booklets/works of reduced proportions;
- simultaneous elaboration of certain experimental procedures to be used for assuring the examination of the degree in which the attainment targets are achieved and, at the same time, the assessment concerning the assimilation of the teaching/learning materials;
- experimenting these both types of materials in the classroom as quickly as possible;
- this process will give a feed-back absolutely necessary in reconsidering/restructuring the hierarchically superior components, and their relative outline; thus, it could be possible to assure a corpus of corrective elements, fundamental for setting up a new curriculum and significant for the following

stages (lists of objectives, of attainment targets, criteria for content selection and organization, "syllabi" for examination etc.);

♥ as an interface of these steps and parallel to them the development of a pre-service and in-service training system is required; this should be focussed on: (a) a proper curriculum aiming at developing certain pedagogical skills for building up/using the already mentioned components; (b) support materials for teachers;

♥ at the end of this stage a competition for school textbooks support materials, innovating didactical technologies etc. can be announced; all these elements will be grounded on certain guiding lines relatively checked and consolidated this time, as well as on the new pedagogical skills acquired during the school practice with the experimental teaching/learning materials.

B. This process can last for about 2-3 years; after this period the system would pass to the operational stage by:

♥ publishing alternative non-experimental materials (booklets, textbooks, workbooks, multimedia aids etc.), whose single evaluation criterion (applied by an Independent Board) would be their fitness to the attainment targets approved by opinion consensus;

♥ these textbooks would have to "penetrate' into the "pedagogical market" only because of their quality, and not by being imposed from the "Centre".

C. The generalization stage will be achieved when the "Centre" activity focusses only on assuring curriculum framework, namely a certain coherence of national education, very widely understood. Such a coherence will perhaps be assured by two possibilities: (I) a unitary system of finalities and attainment targets; (II) a unitary syllabus (including the range of competences, "know-how", skills, knowledge etc.), the examination and assessment activities are grounded on.

Out of the concrete products of a curricular type which have been created according to this strategy - products completely new as to those functioning in today's education system - there have been elaborated syllabuses, textbooks and experimental workbooks of mathematics and foreign languages for primary education (since

September last year until now). The following products have already achieved advanced elaboration:
(a) general objectives for school-stages and subject-matters (secondary education); (b) the new systems of attainment target and of criteria for content selection and organization at the main subject-matters in secondary education (in fact, I hope to have a first draft under discussion until this year's end); (c) experimental teaching/learning materials in Romanian, Geography, History etc. until this year's end; the assessment samples and test data bases are also in an advanced stage.

2.3. Future Priorities

The main difficulties in defining certain priorities for the future are essentially of the following types: (a) legislative (Education Law still being at the level of the Parliamentary Commission for Education, Science, Youth, Sport); (b) financial (because, we should not forget, this reform is, first of all, a problem of investment, which is a top priority, of course); (c) decisional (there has not been a clear decision yet, concerning the chosen strategic model, its directions and implementation steps). However, I shall try to enumerate them, giving the following classification:

A. Strategic Component: (1) elaborating a clear decisional option for one of the concrete strategies in curriculum development;
(2) specifying the general schedule and the one referring to various subject-matters;

B. Institutional Component: (1) specifying the involved institutions and the relation network among them; (2) stating precisely all the existing tasks; (3) elaborating the model for the teaching staff's involvement in curriculum development.

C. "Content" Component: (1) introducing new fields of study demanded by society's changes (economics, business, marketing, social sciences etc.); (2) connecting economically pragmatical concepts to general humanistic ones; (3) assuring a core curriculum concerning communication, information processing, independent thinking, problem solving, human understanding etc.;

(4) developing a capacities/skills-centered curriculum; (5) ensuring the transcultural/global dimension of the curriculum.

D. Curricular Products: (1) elaborating the so-called recommended curricula for fundamental subject-matters (Romanian, Mathematics, History etc.) and those neglected before; (2) creating experimental teaching/learning materials.

# 3. Conclusion

Coming to an end, at the same time trying to draw a conclusion, I would like to express my firm belief that the European integration in the field of curriculum development can be achieved much sooner than the economic one which proves to be far more difficult than it seemed at first sight. Consequently, I ask myself: is education to become the great future chance of our countries? That's an equally demanding challenge for all of us.

NOTES

1. Starting with spring 1990 a great number of articles, studies and opinions concerning the educational reform have been published in the specialized literature as well as in other publications. Their authors have been not only specialists, but also people indirectly connected with education. In time, these ideas settled down offering the possibility for clarifications. From among the highly coherent syntheses one can mention the one, recently offered by S.Cristea (1991a); and Crisan (1991a).

2. See, in this sense, World Bank Reports, 1991a; b; 1992.

3. I mention as an example the research project elaborated by the IES in 1991 or those being in progress in 1992-1994.

1991: A Comparative Study and Proposals Concerning the Improvement of the Teaching Plans in Romania; The Methodology of Designing, Applying and Assessing Curricula; Theoretical and Methodological Guidemarks in Curriculum Design.

In progress (1992-1994): Curricula for Primary School/Scientific Subjects/Humanities; The Evaluation of the Mathematical and Scientific Education in Romania (IEA); Methodology of the Summative and Formative Evaluation;

Alternatives for the Elaboration of the Vocational Training Curricula; Optimization of the School Activities for Children with Special Educational Needs; The Preschool Education in Romania; The Curricula in Different Countries - A Comparative Study; The Romanian School between Tradition and Foreign Influence.

4. For these aspects see Radu, Singer (1991-in press); Crişan (1991b-in press).

5. For one of the first "global strategies" of the reform we dare to mention Radu, Singer (1991-in press); Crişan (1991 a).

6. See Oosten, Hoek (1992).

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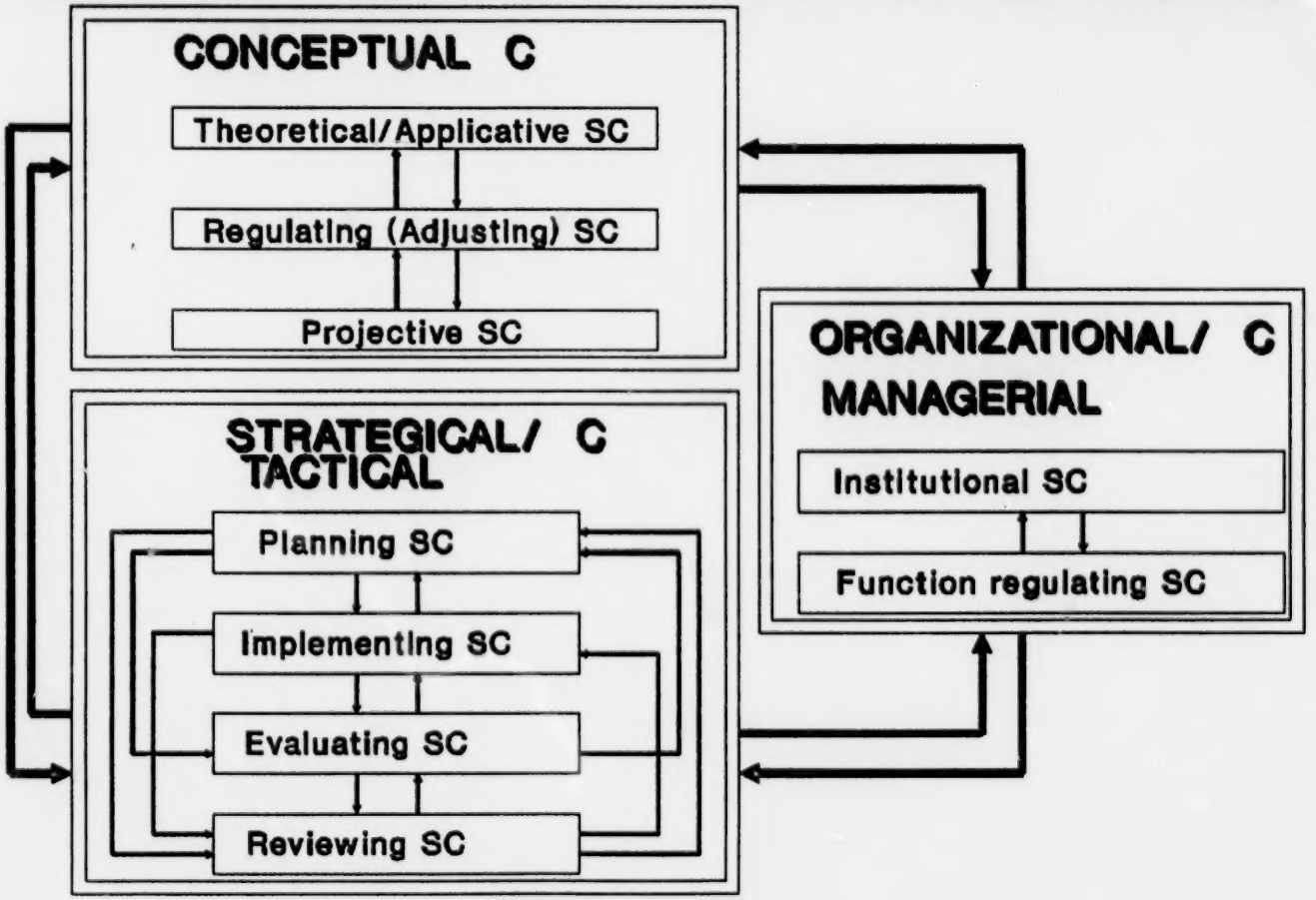
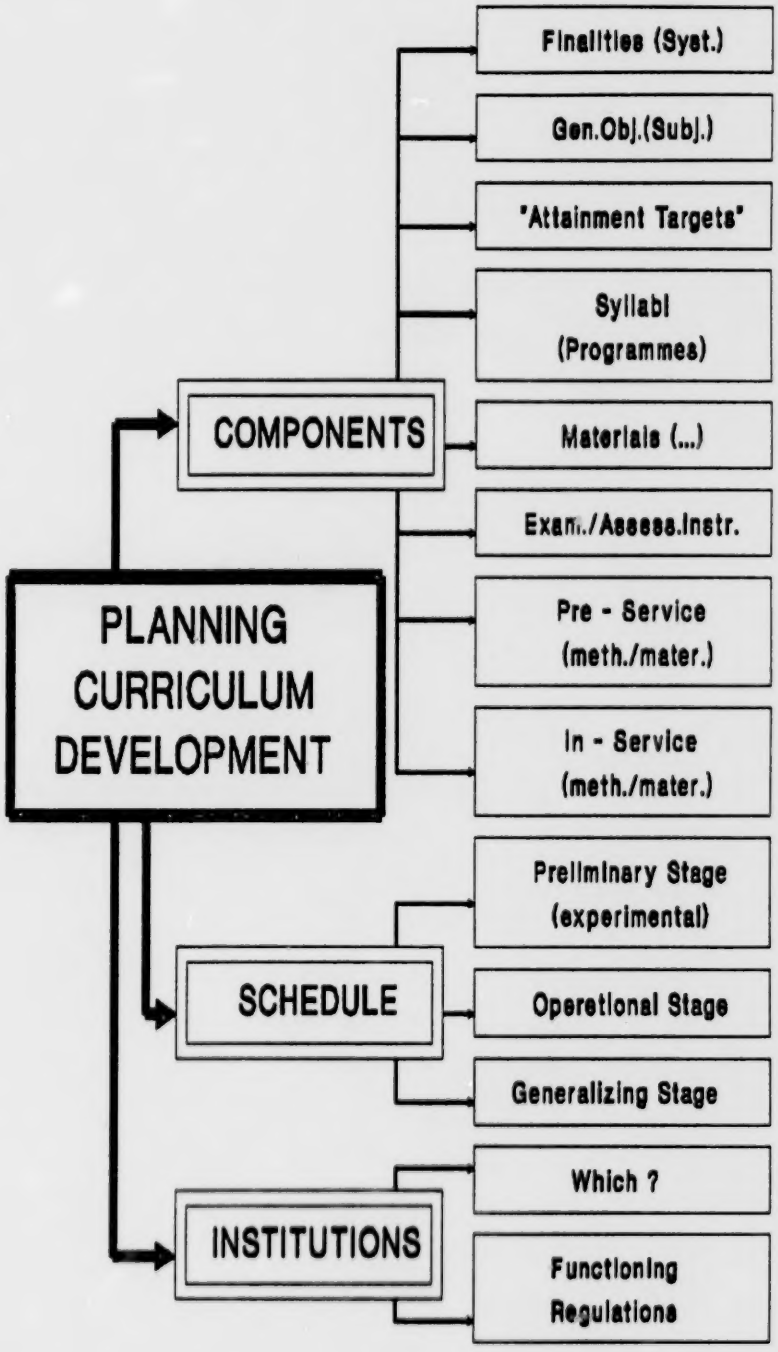
APPENDIX I

# SOME COMPONENTS OF A CURRICULUM REFORM



APPENDIX II

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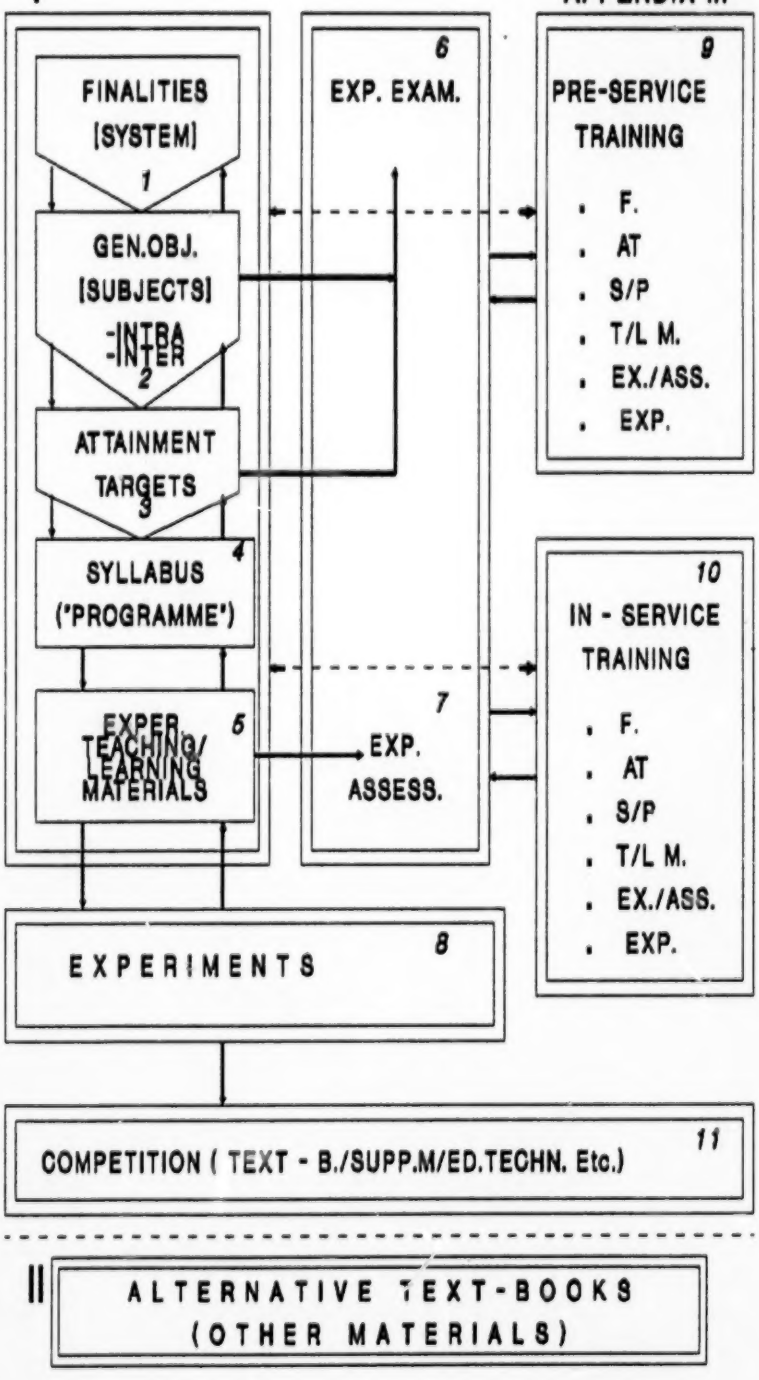
APPENDIX III

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APENDIX IV

# ROMANIA - STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM